

FactSheet 17: Construction Information about the Sideling Hill Road Cut & Exhibit Center



Compiled from various sources by staffs of the Maryland Geological Survey and the Sideling Hill Exhibit Center.

The I-68 roadcut through the crest of Sideling Hill in western Washington County, Maryland, created one of the best geologic exposures in the northeastern United States. Revealing a cross section through a synclinal ridge, this massive cut has proven to be a significant educational and research tool and tourist attraction. Aside from the geology, however, many visitors ask questions about the construction of this roadcut and the Sideling Hill Exhibit Center. This fact sheet attempts to answer many of those questions.

When was this part of the Interstate 68 and the road cut constructed?

Excavation began in April 1983, blasting was completed 16 months later in August 1984; the completed highway was opened in August 1985.

How deep is the Sideling Hill road cut?

The cut is 340 feet deep from the ridge crest to road level. Surface elevation at the ridge crest is about 1,620 feet and at road level about 1,280 feet.



Oblique aerial view west toward the roadcut shows the ridge form of Sideling Hill before construction of the exhibit center and rest area. (Photo by Paul Breeding for the Maryland Geological Survey, 1986)



Oblique view closer to Sideling Hill than the photo at left. In this photo, the Exhibit Center and pedestrian bridge are clearly visible. (Federal Highway Administration, Maryland Division)



Oblique view of the north side (south-facing) side of the roadcut, showing the syncline that underlies Sideling Hill. (Photo by Paul Breeding for the Maryland Geological Survey, 1986)



View west from the pedestrian bridge. (Maryland Geological Survey)

How wide is the road cut?

The road cut is 200 feet wide at road level and 720 feet at the top of the cut.

How was the road cut made?

Blasting with a total of approximately 2,600 tons of explosives was the major method used to break up the rock, which was then removed with giant earthmovers.

How much rock was excavated from Sideling Hill?

4.5 million cubic yards, or about 10 million tons, of rock were removed to make the cut through Sideling Hill. Most of the rock was crushed and used to make the road bed leading to the cut.

Were there any serious accidents or fatalities during the construction of the road cut?

No.

What is the purpose of the horizontal ledges on the face of the Sideling Hill road cut?

The ledges, or benches, are 10 to 20 feet wide and slant towards the mountain to catch and hold falling rocks. The four ledges on each side of the cut are 80 feet apart vertically.

What was the cost of making the Sideling Hill road cut?

The road cut and miles of road cost \$20.1 million, \$10 million less than the next competitive bidder. The project was paid for with 90% Federal monies and 10% State monies.

Who was the contractor for making the Sideling Hill road cut?

The prime contractor was Holloway Construction Company of Wixom, Michigan.

Was a tunnel ever considered in the planning?

The cost of continuous maintenance and upkeep would make a tunnel more expensive and a poor choice. Also, people hurt in accidents would be much more easily evacuated from the road cut by helicopter.

How much did the Sideling Hill Exhibit Center cost?

The building cost \$1.8 million. The entire complex of the center, parking lots, water and sewer systems cost about \$5.5 million. The project was funded entirely by State monies.

How long did it take to build the Exhibit Center?

The Exhibit Center was begun in the spring of 1989, and the building was completed in July 1991. Architect Henry Dubay, of Greiner Engineering, Baltimore, Maryland designed the Exhibit Center.

When was the Sideling Hill Exhibit Center opened to the public?

Governor William Donald Schaefer dedicated and opened the Sideling Hill Exhibit Center to the public on August 2, 1991.

Some links for more information:

- * Geology of the Sideling Hill Road cut: <http://www.mgs.md.gov/esic/brochures/sideling.html>
- * Sideling Hill Exhibit Center: <http://www.dnr.state.md.us/publiclands/western/sidelinghill.html>

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